

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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DISENGAGEMENT'S UNCERTAIN FATE

By *Geoffrey Aronson*

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has promised to chart a new, unprecedented path for Israel's 39 year occupation of territories captured in June 1967. In the aftermath of the costly Palestinian rebellion against Israeli rule in the early 2000s, Olmert has pledged to modify a policy defined by conquest, expansion, and denial of the national rights of Palestinians. In a May 24, 2006, address to the U.S. Congress, Olmert declared,

Painfully, we the people of Israel have learned to change our perspective. We have to compromise in the name of peace, to give up parts of our promised land in which every hill and every valley is saturated with Jewish history and in which our heroes are buried. We have to relinquish part of our dream to leave room for the dream of others, so that all of us can enjoy a better future. For this painful but necessary task my government was elected. And to this I am fully committed.

The Basic Guidelines of the government Olmert heads reflect this change of emphasis:

The Government will strive to shape the permanent borders of the State of Israel as a Jewish state, with a Jewish majority, and as a democratic state. . . . Israel's territory, the borders of which will be determined by the Government, will entail the reduction of Israeli settlement in Judea and Samaria.

As recently as 2003, the newly reelected government headed by Ariel Sharon had declared in its guidelines a more aggressive and expansionist course of action:

to strengthen, expand, and promote settlement throughout the country. . . . The Government views settlement, in all its manifestations, as having great social and national value, and it will act to strengthen the ability to deal with the difficulties and challenges faced by the settlement effort. During its term of office, the Government will not establish new settlements. The Government will provide for ongoing needs in the development of existing settlements. The Government will act with firm resolve to ensure the security of the Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria.

Olmert's declared readiness to modify long-standing assumptions and to remove settlements as part of an effort to consolidate and strengthen a permanent territorial presence behind new "security lines" requiring the annexation of approximately 10 percent of the West

Bank marks a new era in the evolution of Israel's settlement and security policies. Yet in his short time in power, Olmert, in contrast to Sharon, has raised more questions than answers about his intentions and ability to realize them. In place of a coherent plan with a defined strategy of implementation that addresses domestic, security, and international aspects, Olmert's intentions and actions appear confused and often contradictory. This absence of consistent purpose has undermined the new premier's most important asset—belief in the credibility of his intentions. The lack of clarity in Olmert's leadership has encouraged opponents of all stripes, raising doubts among friend and foe about his readiness and ability to establish the post-Oslo, post-intifada settlement and security policy he has championed.

The Plan

Today, there is virtually no one on Israel's domestic scene who trusts in Olmert's ability to deliver an evacuation of all West Bank settlements east of the yet-to-be completed separation barrier - amounting to some 170 settlement locations, including so-called outposts, with a combined population of 60,000. As prime minister, Sharon faced an even greater degree of skepticism when he first announced his disengagement plan for Gaza and the West Bank in early 2004. But unlike Sharon, who detailed his intention to uncomprehending U.S. officials months before its public debut,

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TO OUR READERS

Israel's military incursion into Gaza following the abduction of an Israeli soldier and weeks of spiraling conflict proves again that violence is built into the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate. Without negotiations that address the needs of both peoples, offer hope for a two-state peace, and promise an end to occupation and Israeli policies that make life intolerable for Palestinians, Palestinian rebellion that terrorizes Israeli society and brutal Israeli counter force are inevitable.

It seems clear after years of abortive efforts that Israelis and Palestinians cannot make peace by themselves. The vast disparity of power between them emboldens Israel, as the occupier, to use force to seize land, build settlements, and create walls and borders that ignore Palestinian needs. Fragile, ideologically divided political systems on both sides are hostage to extreme elements. And armed forces on both sides lack strategic wisdom. The IDF, which dominates Israeli policy, still believes,

against all experience, that if force fails to subdue Palestinian violence, more force will succeed. Similarly, Palestinian militants still pursue the fantasy that armed struggle will bring liberation. Polls show both societies want peace, but in crises, reason yields to vengeance and support for violence.

The failure of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to deal sensibly with the current crises reveals these weaknesses. There is a clear need for strong third party mediation, a mutual ceasefire, and final status negotiations between Israel and the PLO toward an agreed peace. The alternative is more circular violence and self-serving unilateralism. Unfortunately, the U.S. seems more interested in a misguided effort to undermine Hamas and support Ehud Olmert's vanishing "realignment" policy than in using the current crisis as an opportunity to lay a foundation for renewed peace negotiations.

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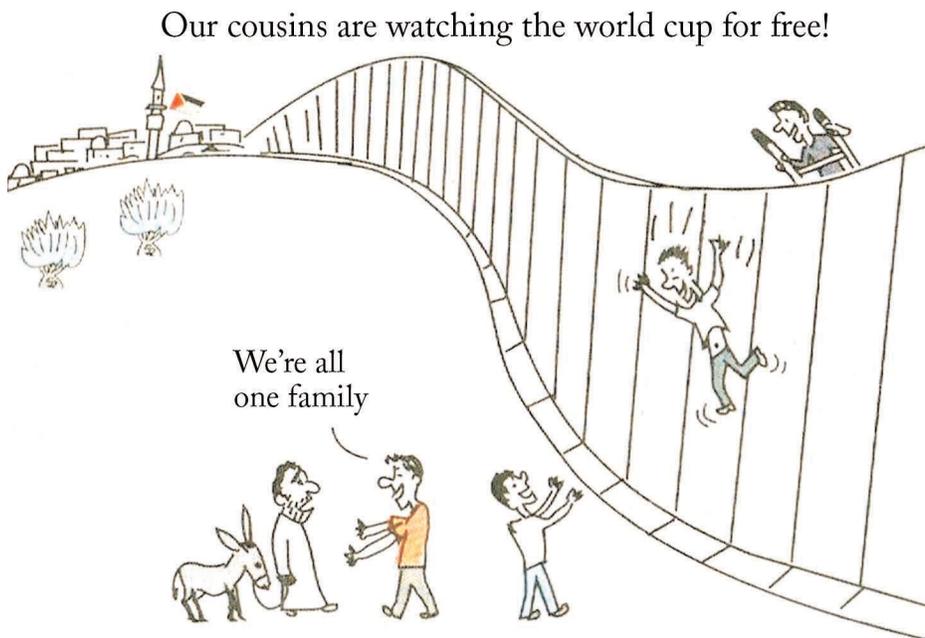
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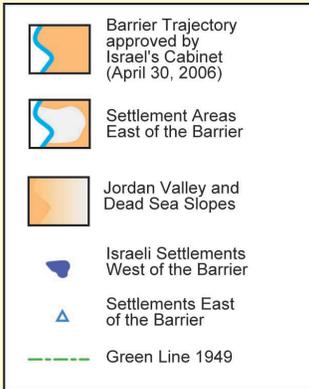
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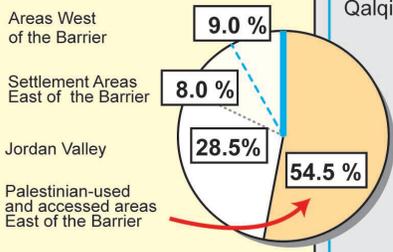
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Ha'aretz, May 29, 2006

West Bank Separation Barrier - July 2006



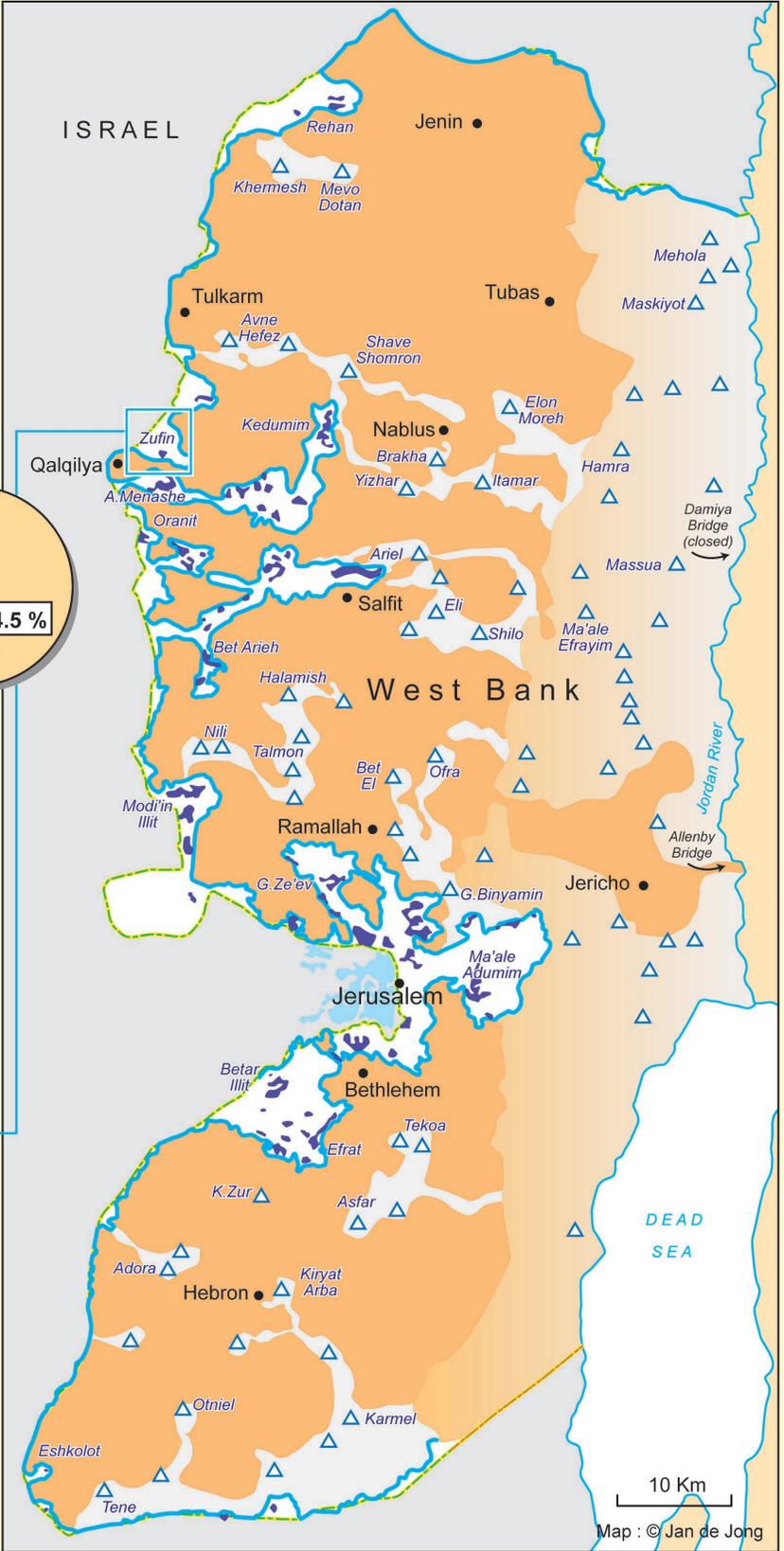
West Bank Area Percentages After the Barrier



Population:

West of the Barrier:
 Palestinians - 240,836 of which 213,898 reside in East Jerusalem
 Isr. Settlers - 352,183 of which 176,031 reside in East Jerusalem

East of the Barrier:
 Palestinians - 2,203,642 of which 47,400 reside in the Jordan Valley
 Israeli Settlers - 60,141 of which 8,860 reside in the Jordan Valley



SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

April 1 Settlers from Kiryat Arba uproot 60 olive trees planted two days earlier in the Wadi al-Hussein area of Hebron. (OCHA)

April 2 The municipality of Salfit declares a state of emergency after sewage dumped from the settlement of Ariel contaminates the sole water well supplying surrounding villages. (Palestine Information Center)

April 3 Israeli attorney general Meni Mazuz annuls an agreement made by an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) commander with settlers who had squatted in dwellings in the Hebron market. The settlers had evacuated the area under the agreement which would have allowed them to reoccupy the market area in the future. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

April 4 Israeli military sources disclose plans to turn the Qalandia checkpoint into an international border crossing and rename it "Aterot." (IPC, Agencies)

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reports that housing sales in West Bank settlements decreased by 4.2 percent in January 2006 compared to one year earlier. Sales declines of 55.3 percent in Jerusalem and 38 percent in Haifa were also reported. Of the 1,190 private dwellings sold in January, 1.9 percent were sold in the West Bank and 6.1 percent were sold in Jerusalem. (*Yediot Aharonot, Ma'ariv*)

April 6 Peace Now files a petition against the defense minister, the IDF and four regional councils for failing to carry out evacuation orders issued two years ago for six outpost settlements. The orders are set to expire in May for the evacuation of Givat Assaf, Givat HaRoeh, Ma'ale Rehavam, Mitzpeh Lachish, Mitzpeh Yitzhar, and Ramat Gilad. (Arutz 7)

Hebron settlers move into a building near the Avraham Avinu neighborhood, after showing ownership documents to the IDF. Settlers claim that the building was purchased from a Palestinian family. Palestinians challenge the validity of the documents. (*Ha'aretz*)

April 7 *Ha'aretz* reports that some 5,000 Palestinians holding Israeli identity cards but residing outside Jerusalem have relocated to East Jerusalem neighborhoods since the beginning of the year.

In East Jerusalem, settlers and police clash with a Palestinian family when the settlers

attempt to move in to their house, which was purchased by the Elad organization in the al-Tur neighborhood. (*Ha'aretz*)

April 11 Security responsibility for the separation barrier around the Jerusalem and West Bank environs is transferred from the IDF to the Jerusalem police. (*Ha'aretz*)

Kol Ha'ir reports the local committee for construction and planning in Jerusalem having approved a new route for the eastern ring road between Abu Dis and Tzur Baher that is farther away from residential areas.

April 13 A Palestinian resident of al-Tur is murdered for selling his house to the Elad organization. (*Ha'aretz*)

April 12–18 Israeli soldiers occupy a number of houses in the H2 area of Hebron to enhance security for settlers celebrating Passover. Israeli settlers attack Palestinian homes in the vicinity of the Abraham Avinu, Kharsina, Kiryat Arba, and Tel Rumeida settlements in the Hebron area. (OCHA)

April 14 *Yediot Aharonot* reports that Israel has revoked a plan to discard trash from central Israel on land near the West Bank settlement of Kedumim.

The settlement of Beitar Illit discharges sewage onto lands belonging to the villages of Wadi Fukin and Nahhalin. (OCHA)

April 16 Clashes erupt between settlers and the IDF in Beit El and the neighboring settlement of Dolev after settlers violate a military ban on marching near Ramallah. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli soldiers order the temporary closure of the al-Fayha Girls School and al-Ibrahimiya Boys School in the H2 section of Hebron to allow for Passover celebrations. (OCHA)

April 17 Settlers from Elon Moreh fire at Palestinian shepherds from Deir al-Hatab, Nablus, and confiscate some sheep. (OCHA)

April 18 Settlers from the Kohav Hashahar settlement attack Palestinian shepherds and farmers cultivating their land beside the Alon Road. (OCHA)

Israel's High Court of Justice rejects petitions by Palestinians to delay the completion of the separation barrier near the villages of al-Jib, al-Ram, Beit Hanina, Bir Naballah, Jedira, and Qalandia. (*Ha'aretz*)

April 19 Construction of the separation barrier continues around Jerusalem, with the exception of the area northeast of al-Azariya toward Ma'ale Adumim. Construction along the 3-kilometer section south of the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Kedar stopped on March 3, 2006, pending resolution of a court case. (OCHA)

The IDF requisitions 25 dunams belonging to the Palestinian towns of Beit Ummar and Halhul to create a buffer zone around the settlement of Karnei Tsur. (OCHA)

April 20 Settlers attack and injure three international volunteers accompanying Palestinian students home from school in the H2 area of Hebron City. (OCHA)

April 21 In Bil'in, Israeli Border Police fire tear gas and rubber-coated bullets at demonstrators protesting the construction of the separation barrier. Seven Palestinians and two Israelis are injured, seven Palestinians are detained, and three police soldiers are injured from rocks. (OCHA)

April 22 Dozens of settlers attack two female volunteers from the international Tel Rumeida Project in Hebron as they block the settlers' entry to a Palestinian-owned store. (*Ha'aretz*)

Palestinians and Israeli activists protest the construction of an inner fence in the southern Hebron hills separating the villagers of al-Tawani from their land and the town of Yatta, where basic services are located. (*Ha'aretz*)

April 23 Palestinians from the village of Hawara, south of Nablus, accuse settlers of causing thousands of shekels in damages by torching their trucks and an electrical generator. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

April 26 Construction continues for the barrier around Rachel's Tomb, Bethlehem. (OCHA)

April 28 *Yediot Aharonot* reports a meeting between the head of the kibbutz movement and leaders of the YESHA Council aimed at preventing further violent clashes in the West Bank between settlers and Palestinian farmers supported by kibbutz volunteers. The groups agreed to draw a clear map of Palestinian and state land.

April 29 Settlers from Ma'on throw stones and eggs at an IDF jeep accompanying five Palestinian children from school

SETTLEMENT TIME LINE

to their village of Hirbat al-Tuwani. (*Ha'aretz*)

Settlers from the Adi Ad outpost attack Palestinians working land adjacent to the outpost and shoot to death one of their horses. (*Yediot Aharonot*)

April 30 *Ha'aretz* reports the IDF and Israeli police giving settlers 10 days to evacuate a Palestinian home in Hebron. The purchasing documents that the settlers presented (see April 6 entry) were fraudulent.

The Israeli cabinet changes the route of the separation barrier around the Ariel-Kedumim settlements, dividing the original "finger" into two to allow east-west access between the villages of Dier Istiya and Qarawat Bani Hassan and severing direct links between some villages and Qalqilya. (OCHA and B'tselem)

The cabinet also changes the route of the separation barrier in two other locations: around the settlement of Eshkolot, excluding the quarry managed by the settlement council; next to the Palestinian village of al-Jab'a; and around Beit Iksha, leaving it north of the barrier. (OCHA)

A road side bomb detonates on the Elon Moreh settlement bypass road as a settler bus passes. No injuries were reported. (OCHA)

May 1 The Israeli Defense Ministry publishes an updated map of the separation barrier following changes made by the government. (<http://www.securityfence.mod.gov.il/Pages/ENG/route.htm>) (*Ha'aretz*)

May 6 Settlers from the Havot Ma'on outpost injure three Palestinian students from Umm Tuba, Hebron, on their way home from school as well as two IDF soldiers escorting them. (OCHA)

May 7 Twenty-one police and settlers are injured and twenty-five settlers are arrested during the evacuation of the West Bank settlement of Beit Shapira. Settlers throw rocks and flammable canisters at soldiers and slash army vehicle tires. (*Ma'ariv*)

The Israeli government informs the High Court of its plan to map unauthorized housing construction in settlement outposts in response to a petition by Peace Now to remove the outposts of Horsha and HaYovel. (*Ha'aretz*)

Settlers uproot 30 olive trees and 25 fig trees near the village of Ramin, Tulkarem. (OCHA)

Settlers from Shim'a, in the Hebron region, uproot 70 olive trees belonging to Palestinian families from al-Samu'. (OCHA)

Ha'aretz reports the Jerusalem municipality ordering the Elad organization to stop its archeological dig next to a children's playground in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Wadi Hilwa in Silwan for fear that school property is being damaged. Elad had recently bought buildings in the neighborhood and was awarded responsibility for developing the national park, City of David.

May 10 The IDF continues installation of three-meter-high concrete slabs along Road 60 from the Shavei Shomeron checkpoint south to Deir Sharaf Junction to establish a security zone and a barrier around the settlement of Shavei Shomron. (OCHA)

The IDF removes roadblocks installed by Israeli settlers from Ma'on on May 2 intended to prevent a convoy protecting Palestinian school children from Umm Tuba from reaching their school. (OCHA)

May 11 Five settlers thought to be from the Brakha B outpost attempt to burn a trailer at a Palestinian quarry near the village of Hawara, Nablus. (*Ha'aretz*)

Ha'aretz reports the dismantlement of a police post in Otniel settlement following an increase in incidents of settlers harassing the policemen stationed there.

May 14 *Ha'aretz* reports IDF officials recommending the immediate evacuation of the Bracha B outpost to curb settler violence.

May 17 *Ha'aretz* reports that 95 percent of the demolition orders issued in East Jerusalem in 2005 for illegal construction were carried out. Eighty demolition orders were issued in East Jerusalem, compared to 216 in 2004. In West Jerusalem, only 65 percent of similar orders were carried out.

Ha'aretz reports that Justice Minister Haim Ramon commits to finishing construction on 95 percent of the separation barrier by the end of 2006. Only 42 percent (336 km) of the planned 790 km structure has been completed and military officials say it will take at least one more year to finish. They report that one hundred two kilometers are in various stages of construction, and will be com-

pleted by year's end. Sixty-seven kilometers are still at the paperwork level, and the building of 285 kilometers awaits court approval.

May 18 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz extend the demolition orders for 12 outposts in the West Bank that had been signed two years ago and were to expire by the end of May.

GOC commander Yair Naveh authorizes plans to expand the municipal boundaries of the Beitar Illit settlement by 500 dunams, connecting the settlement and the Green Line. An industrial zone is planned for the area. Expansion plans for the Givat Ze'ev, Maskiyot and Oranit settlements have also been approved in recent weeks. (*Ha'aretz*)

The settlement of Beitar Illit again discards its sewage onto lands belonging to the Palestinian village of Wadi Fukin, Bethlehem. (OCHA)

A Palestinian gunman opens fire, injuring two settlers on Road 505 near Osarin village, Nablus. (OCHA)

May 19 Border Police firing rubber-coated bullets injure seven Palestinians at a demonstration against the separation barrier in the Shuafat refugee camp, Jerusalem. Israeli police firing tear gas and rubber coated bullets injure 26 during a demonstration in Bil'in, Ramallah. (OCHA)

May 20 Settlers from Kiryat Arba injure a 12-year-old Palestinian boy in an assault along Prayers Road in the H2 area of Hebron. Settlers from Bat Ayin assault an elderly Palestinian farmer from the town of Beit Ummar, Hebron, as he worked his land. (OCHA)

May 21 *Ma'ariv* reports the complete encirclement of the village of al-Muakher, where 1,200 reside, as a result of a temporary separation barrier erected between the Atarot industrial area and Road 404 to Jerusalem. The only entry/exit is an underground passage to the village of Beir Naballah.

Ha'aretz reports Education Minister Yuli Tamir stating that Ariel College in the West Bank will not become a university.

May 22 Palestinians stone and injure a settler in al-Lubban al-Sharqiya, Nablus, as he traveled on Road 60 near the village. (OCHA)

Olmert, months after introducing the idea, has no plan to sell, only a series of often contradictory ideas still lacking a defined territorial dimension. Confidants of Olmert are reported to believe that such a map will not be forthcoming for "at least one year." Sharon, when faced with a similar situation, found himself quickly expanding the breadth of Israel's evacuation of the Gaza Strip to include all settlements and the border with Egypt. In contrast, Olmert is finding that his ideas for a West Bank retreat, like Sharon's, are moving in the opposite direction. Sharon's original idea to evacuate 17 West Bank settlements was reduced to 4, and the settlement areas remain under strict control of the Israel Defense Forces, vitiating any advantage to Palestinians. If Sharon's action in Gaza rather than in the West Bank is to be Olmert's model, the removal, at the least, of all settlements east of the barrier is necessary. But Olmert does not seem to be master of the process he has unleashed. The drive to expand and settle remains paramount.

Dynamic of Settlement

The campaign to consolidate the permanent presence of settlers by separating them from Palestinians proceeds everywhere in the West Bank without reference to the evacuation idea. Not only are separate systems of roads being created, but a pass system of sorts is also being established to distinguish Palestinian vehicles from those belonging to settlers.

Settlement expansion proceeds relentlessly, and not only in those areas of the West Bank marked for annexation west of the separation barrier. Small numbers of settlers from Gaza are resettling in the West Bank settlements of Eshkolot south of Hebron, Ariel, and in the Jordan Valley's Maskiyot. Olmert's evacuation plan itself is a cover for continuing expansion. As *Ha'aretz* reported on May 4, 2006, "Olmert plans to build thousands of new dwellings in settlements in order to house evacuees from isolated settlements." He is also opposed to changing the preferred status of settlements that entitles them to state subsidies. Defense Minister Amir Peretz has approved expanding the territorial jurisdiction of four settlements—Givat Ze'ev, Oranit, Maskiyot, and Betar Ilit—yet another form of settlement expansion. All but a few of the scores of settlement outposts that Israel promised the U.S. and international community it would dismantle continue untouched by Israel's courts or political leadership. "In the first quarter of 2006," wrote Dror Etkes, the Peace Now representative leading the public campaign against these settlements, "the State of Israel continued to ignore its commitment both in the area of enforcing the law towards its citizens living on the West Bank and in the political and international context in which Israel is committed to evacuate the outposts created after March 2001."

The removal of 60,000 or so West Bank settlers living east of the separation barrier will dwarf the Gaza experience. The IDF is advising that a framework for housing and compensation be created to promote a voluntary evacuation by most

settlers before executing the final retreat. Yet such a framework requires a decision on a map that details Israel's retreat in order to determine which settlements are to be evacuated. Olmert is, at best, many months away from this basic decision and he opposes enacting legislation before making such a determination. Adding to the confusion are suggestions by Olmert and others that settlers might be permitted to remain *after* evacuation. Such ideas are nonsense, but they are an invitation to settlers and their patrons to oppose the plan in the face of Olmert's indecisiveness. Aides suggest that the evacuation east of the barrier will be far short of complete, with settlements in and around Hebron and Ramallah excluded. Vice Premier Shimon Peres suggests evacuating only two small settlements in the Nablus area. As Olmert's difficulties and the price of evacuation mount to the tens of billions of dollars, the trend appears to be in the direction of a smaller and far less significant withdrawal than what Olmert himself views as necessary.

According to press reports, Olmert told U.S. president George W. Bush that Israel intends to withdraw the IDF along with settlers on the model of Gaza, where, however, the subsequent and entirely anticipated rearming of Palestinians is now viewed as a costly failure. Maintaining a controlling IDF presence throughout the evacuated areas of the West Bank, including a Jordan Valley "security zone" and at border crossings between the West Bank and Jordan, would indeed contradict the strategic intent to "separate" from the Palestinian West Bank.

The key, if implicit, partnership with Hamas that enabled Sharon to complete a pacific evacuation of the Gaza Strip is more than ever in doubt. The Gaza evacuation was based upon a foundation that featured Hamas's commitment to a unilateral cease-fire, its contesting of elections to the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Israel's almost complete retreat from all of Gaza and the border with Egypt. For evacuation of the West Bank to proceed on a similar scale requires a degree of understanding between Israel and Hamas—the ruling Palestinian party—that may now be out of reach. Olmert, far more than Sharon, has championed a major withdrawal from West Bank settlements as his, and his Kadima Party's, political *raison d'être*. He wants a complete separation from Palestinians east of the barrier, for which he needs Hamas to maintain a security environment that will make an Israeli evacuation possible. As in Gaza, Israel will not retreat from the West Bank "under fire." A complete evacuation of settlements east of the barrier is of course criticized as insufficient by all Palestinians, including Hamas. Yet the Hamas leadership, which saw an interest in facilitating Israel's evacuation of Gaza, and in allowing Olmert to run for election unmolested by terror, has been prepared to enable a redeployment of similar scale in the West Bank as a step toward liberation.

The end of this implicit cooperation may well have been signaled by the chain of events leading to Israel's reentry to

Israel High Court of Justice Ruling on Tzufin

On June 15, 2006, the High Court of Justice, reversing itself, ordered a change in the route of the separation barrier around the West Bank settlement of Tzufin. The court ruled that the state hid the fact that the barrier's original route, 2.5 kilometer distant from the nearest settlement dwelling, was based upon Tzufin's expansion plans rather than strict security concerns.

Excerpts from the Court ruling follow:

In the petition before us, a grave pattern has been discovered. The complete picture was not presented to the High Court in the first petition. The court denied the first petition on the basis of evidence that was not presented in full. The information presented to the court did not clarify the full considerations of the planners that went into determining the route of the fence.

The defendants [The Government of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces] stated that the route of the eastern part of the fence [security barrier] was determined strictly by security considerations. . . . The defendants' stance was that the area between the fence and the eastern part of [the settlement of] Tzufin was necessary for the sake of security. The one thousand dunams between the settlement and the barrier, of which 650 is privately owned agricultural land, creates a geographic security zone that allows security forces to reach terrorists infiltrating the barrier before they reach the state's territory.

[In its initial ruling] the court ruled that in light of the security considerations that stood as the basis for determining the route of the fence, its immediate negative impact on the [Palestinian] plaintiffs was acceptable.

The [Palestinian] plaintiffs argued that, contrary to the defendants' contention in the original petition, the route of the eastern section of the fence was not determined by security considerations, but rather to enable the expansion of Tzufin . . . [and that] the defendants do not carry out their responsibility to enable the continuation of farming of agricultural land in the seam zone [west of the barrier].

[Following reconsideration of evidence,] We are ruling that the route of the fence along the eastern part is not legal and we are declaring its cancellation.

According to the [proposed] new 1,350-meter route, approximately 1,000 dunams of land, including 650 dunams that are Palestinian agricultural land, will be removed from the lands west of the fence and instead be left on the "Palestinian" side of the [new] fence [route].

We conclude:

(A) the route of the fence on the eastern side is canceled.

(B) the defendants will continue to make efforts to relieve travel difficulties and problems so that agricultural lands that are within the seam zone can be reached [by Palestinian farmers]. As is stated in their message on 6.30.05. With the completion of the construction of the fence in its new route, and

until the dismantlement of the current route, the defendants will open the agricultural gates in the eastern portion to traffic without restrictions, as is stated in their message of 2.19.06.

(C) The defendants will pay the expenses of the plaintiffs in the sum of USD 11,600.

Ruling 2732/05, High Court of Justice Website

Settler Relocation-Compensation Legislation Offered

The Knesset is not waiting to see when the consolidation plan will be implemented. This morning a relocation-compensation law will be submitted to enable settlers to relocate and evacuate in exchange for compensation.

According to the proposal, settlers of settlements that are slated to remain outside of the separation barrier could leave their houses and be compensated without waiting for the final evacuation plan.

The legislation's co-sponsors, Matan Vilan (Meretz) and Collette Avital (Labor) stated that the proposal was created following the requests of many settlers in the West Bank to be given an opportunity to leave their settlements by choice.

Yediot Aharonot, May 10, 2006

DISENGAGEMENT'S, *continued from page 6*

parts of Gaza in late June that complicated the strategic intentions of both leadership. Hamas' comeuppance may ironically signal the demise of Olmert's West Bank plans as well.

"The inevitable conclusion from this week's events," wrote *Ha'aretz* correspondent Aluf Benn on June 30, 2006, "is that Israel will not be able to leave the West Bank, shut itself behind the fence and throw away the keys. The convergence plan Olmert presented before the elections now needs thorough refurbishing. The current alternatives are all very bad: A total withdrawal like in Gaza, and periodic incursions to fight terror; reliance on Jordan to prevent weapons smuggling into the West Bank; evacuating the settlers and leaving the Israel Defense Forces in a 'security strip' that invites terror attacks; or understandings with Abbas and indirectly with Hamas, which did not hold up in Gaza."

There is however, opportunity as well as peril in the current crisis. The events in and around Gaza have created an opportunity for both Olmert and the PA to create a workable partnership for resolving their ongoing confrontation, one which includes more explicit commitments by all parties to end hostilities in order to maximize an Israeli retreat in the West Bank. ♦

TERRITORIAL FRAGMENTATION OF THE WEST BANK, MAY 2006

The ability of Palestinians to move inside the West Bank has significantly worsened in the past nine months. The Israeli government states that the reason behind these restrictions is to prevent militant attacks on Israeli citizens. . . .

A combination of checkpoints, physical obstacles, and a permit system has effectively cut the West Bank into three distinct areas in addition to East Jerusalem. Within these areas further enclaves have been created—also bordered by checkpoints and roadblocks—that has led to one Palestinian community being isolated from its neighbor.

The Jordan Valley is practically cut off to Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank. And, over the past year, progressively fewer Palestinians have been able to obtain permits to visit ‘closed areas’—land to the west of the West Bank barrier.

Restrictions on movement are at the heart of the Palestinian economic decline. . . .

Trade Routes

Trade routes from the northern West Bank to Nablus and further to the south or into the Jordan Valley have been severed for northern residents. Vendors of perishable products such as vegetables and fruit have no access to markets. Sales of agricultural products have become particularly important and is one of the few economic alternatives for the increasing number of unemployed who previously worked in Israel. . . .

Physical obstacles include the West Bank Barrier, checkpoints, partial checkpoints, road blocks, road gates, earth mounds, earth walls, trenches and fences. Movement within the West Bank is obstructed by these physical obstacles placed by the IDF. The number of which has increased from 376 in August 2005 to 504 in April 2006—a 25 percent increase.”

Excerpts from a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Occupied Palestinian Territories, May 2006

All signs point to our being pulled, albeit unwillingly, to further battle over the “outposts” in the coming weeks.

Once again the government and the press will try to cloud the political motivation for their actions claiming a purist concern for the law. Anyone who understands the issues, however, has no problem at all seeing the real drive behind these actions—if only they uncover their eyes.

It’s still unclear whether the struggle will begin in Givat Harel, Givat Asaf, Migron or Kedah but we must prepare regardless.

I believe that, with proper and timely preparation, we will be able to stymie the political desires of Olmert and his cronies. Such desires to demoralize and defeat Zionist idealism have been thwarted in the past. True, our situation is quite difficult today, but that only means that we must pre-

pare more diligently.

This is the time to knock the dust from our feet and the summer lethargy from our souls in order to invest time and energy to brake the political machines poised to destroy our homes, throw hundreds of us from our communities and endanger the very future of Eretz Yisrael.

We have the strength to change the course of events. If we are determined, we will succeed.

May we be strengthened by our blessings,

Pinchas Vallerstein
Mayor, Binyamin Regional Council

“The Outposts—Between Facts and Lies”
http://www.binyamin.org.il/mattebiny_en/home.asp
June 27, 2006

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